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The Canada Council
Conseil des Arts du Canada

Notes for a talk
to the (U.S.) National Conference
on Administration of Research,
Montreal, September 20, 1973.

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I am honoured to be asked to join so distinguished a group of North American leaders of thought as I see here. I note that you have chosen in your working sessions, though not I suppose with your lunch, to deal with national problems. It may be significant that you have taken up that theme in your first conference outside the borders of the United States. In Canada, we too have national problems and, as so often before, we may each see solutions more clearly by joining together in the search. At the very least, we can offer each other sympathy and understanding.

So that you may understand a little of my perspective on national problems, I should tell you something about the Canada Council which I serve. The short title may be quite misleading; the Act of Parliament which created the Council in 1957 designated its purpose as being "for the encouragement of the arts, humanities and social sciences". The Council is established along the lines of some of the great American foundations, but with a few specifically Canadian twists. It consists of a chairman and vice-chairman plus 19 other members, none of them public servants, appointed by the federal Cabinet for a fixed term. It is explicitly declared not to be an agency of the Crown, which means that the government is not directly responsible for the Council's actions, good or bad. This is a happy state of affairs for both parties, since it allows the Council to do things which are good but not always popular without unduly embarrassing the government.

In its first years, the Council operated almost entirely on the proceeds of its original \$50 million endowment. Today however, it is funded mainly by an annual contribution from Parliament, in somewhat the same way that the United States Endowment for the Humanities and Endowment

for the Arts are funded by Congress. It may interest you to know that proportionately our present public contribution from Parliament is substantially greater than the total contribution received from Congress by the two American endowments. In addition, the Council has received a few substantial gifts and bequests, including a gift of \$4,350,000 and a bequest valued at about \$12 million, both from the late Mrs. Dorothy J. Killam. The Council's total budget for the current year is \$45 million, of which \$22 million is for the humanities and social sciences.

We are required by Parliament to promote the production, study and enjoyment of works in the arts, humanities and social sciences. Perhaps I should explain why we have a public foundation of this kind. One of the reasons, of course, is that we have almost no large private foundations of the kind so prominent in the United States.

Essentially, however, the Canada Council is a direct though only partial response to one of our great national problems, the need to promote and develop a specific cultural identity. This identity has been and remains difficult to achieve. For one thing, Canadians are divided linguistically and culturally into two main communities and many of them have remained very close to their European roots. And there is the fact that our population is relatively small and dispersed across a whole continent, mostly in a narrow ribbon running along our southern border. Thus most Canadians have more Americans than Canadians living within close range, and are constantly exposed - for better or for worse - to the pervasive influence of the powerful American media.

After World War II, our Government became concerned about the possible effect on the Canadian identity if Canadians were reading and listening to and watching more material produced in another country than they did material from their own country. As our governments like to do, they appointed a Royal Commission which reported in 1951. That report contained the idea that there should be a public foundation to help Canadians enjoy and study the works of other Canadians. A few years later two millionaires died and the federal treasury gained by about

\$100 million dollars from taxes on their estates; one of these gentlemen was chiefly known as a steel magnate and the other as a pulp and paper magnate, though the latter had as one of his incidental holdings a controlling ownership in the (then) Brooklyn Dodgers. Sixteen years ago the Government of the day chose to put this windfall into the hands of the public foundation that had been recommended, and so was born the Canada Council.

When I describe the Canada Council as a public foundation, I mean that it was publicly created and operates mostly with public funds. However, as I have indicated, it is self-governing and has the final say in the disbursement of its funds. In this it is different from the National Research Council and Medical Research Council of Canada, which are direct agents of the government. It also differs in that the total budget last year of these other two Councils for grants to extramural research was about \$113 million, whereas we spent \$22 million for the human sciences. This does not mean however that the technical problems of our country are five times more important than its human problems.

Perhaps I can describe briefly what we have been trying to do under a few general headings. The first I have already mentioned: that Canadians as a people are cast very widely over huge territory and are separated by historic, cultural and physical barriers to knowing one another well. Inevitably in such a country, the resources on which we can feed our minds and imaginations are more concentrated than are the people. So we need programs to help bring the people to the resources and to help take the resources out to where the people are.

The Canada Council spends nearly half its budget every year to help promising people to qualify as professionals in the production, study and enjoyment of works of the mind and imagination. This we do through a program of study awards and fellowships of a kind familiar enough to you. We are convinced that unless talented young people are given the chance to become scholars or artists in their chosen field, the country as a whole will be much the poorer. This is not a direct

contribution to the solution of national problems, but unless these young people can prove themselves and improve their abilities, there will be little hope for the solution of future national problems. Meanwhile, these young people are providing fresh ways of looking at ourselves which will often help us to solve our problems.

One consequence of the kind of society we live in and the kind of economic activities we engage in is that the great institutions of learning and the great deposits of the best works of mankind tend to be few in number and concentrated in the largest cities. I hope while you are here you will have a chance to see some of the performances in the theatres, or to look at the possessions of the art museum and the facilities of the universities and libraries. If Canada is to maintain its self-awareness, these great concentrations of treasures must be kept alive and growing.

It is within the province you administer to improve the ways in which information can be stored and transmitted. In the social sciences and humanities, massive amounts of data are stored in electronic memory banks. One of our problems, which you share in the United States, is to protect the individual from any harm that might come to him as a result of an unintended use of combinations of these deposited facts about him. I like the definition by one professor of privacy as "consisting in the maximum possible amount of ignorance on the part of strangers about me and my affairs." I think the enjoyment of privacy is more and more important in what Daniel Bell has called the "post-industrial" society. If the very existence of our affluence and leisure is a tribute to the technological ingenuity which your agencies represent, it is also a challenge to bodies like ours, which were created to enhance the production, study and enjoyment of the works of man's imagination.

We have been involved recently in some rather interesting market analysis of the degree to which live theatre, dance, musical and other professional performances of the best quality are available to Canadians. It turns out that, as you might expect, we have a long way to go to make these totally accessible; but it does seem that, given the great mobility of people, these performances are within reach of

nearly three quarters of the whole Canadian population. Notwithstanding the excellent performance of the Montreal Expos this year, it seems fair to remark that the performing arts are at least as democratic as professional sport in terms of audience. We want to put all the people within reach of excellence.

In another direction, we are about to launch an 'investigation of the presuppositions that underlie conventional university education. With the greatly increased participation of women in all kinds of specialized activities, and with the coming of the kind of personal career that may alter its focus and particular qualifications several times along the way, we question the old assumption that you get a B.A., then an M.A., then a Ph.D. and then go to work for the rest of your life. We hope to learn a good deal from the parallel inquiries going on in your country and others about the same questions.

We deal with creative workers as you do, and we all know that the mere offer of money is not of itself any assurance of resulting excellence. Material means are necessary, but they must be married to the enthusiasms and abilities of the people who are going to use these material means. For this reason, the Canada Council is engaging more and more in conversations with creative people in the worlds of scholarship and the arts, with a view to some kind of meeting of minds about the most productive use of human and material resources which are necessarily very limited.

Does it make sense in our eyes and in the eyes of the archaeologists, to be underwriting excavations in a dozen countries all over the world, or would it be better to concentrate a little bit at least for the next decade or so? Can we afford an elaborate scientific analysis of every election that takes place and if not, by what criteria should we choose the events to be so massively studied? Confronted with an imposing array of proposals for the use of electronic data and for large interdisciplinary teams, are we overlooking the possibility that more might be accomplished in some areas by the individual thinker if he can be relieved of his tedious daily chores? These are questions

in which we are trying to engage systematically the experience and convictions of all those affected by the programs the Canada Council has pursued; we are also trying to reach some who may urge alternative programs.

Any large foundation such as ours, be it private or public, must always be wary of becoming too conservative and be sensitive to new concepts and new forms of action. This may be particularly true in Canada, where, as Margaret Mead says, we are respectful of precedents because we have never had a revolution - or at least, I should say, a successful revolution. On the other hand, we must be careful to nurture and keep alive our historical and cultural inheritance. We have a new program called Explorations which I think provides a good illustration of these two concerns. On the innovation side, it is designed to encourage new forms of creativity and participation in the arts, humanities and social sciences, and unlike our other programs, it is open not only to scholars and professional artists, but to any citizen working in any medium whose project is found worthwhile. At the same time, it offers grants for work on our cultural and historical heritage.

May I ask that in your deliberations here, and on your return to your daily affairs, you should keep in mind that in criticizing foundations for their pedestrian performance - and we welcome this kind of criticism - you should also keep in mind the very real need for additional funds if imaginative programs are to be launched. That kind of constructive thinking and action we would welcome even more.

Thank you.

